**Tihana Kraš** | Sveučilište u Rijeci, Filozofski fakultet, tkras@ffri.uniri.hr
**Nataša Košuta** | Sveučilište u Rijeci, Filozofski fakultet, nkosuta@ffri.uniri.hr
**Maša Plešković** | Sveučilište u Rijeci, Filozofski fakultet, masa.pleskovic@ffri.uniri.hr

# An Online Course on Multilingualism (not only) for Teachers

**TEAM project: *Teacher Education About Multilingualism***

## 1. The TEAM project and its course

TEAM (Teacher Education about Multilingualism)[1] was a strategic partnership for higher education among nine universities in Europe and beyond, funded by European Union's Erasmus+ Key Action 203 (KA203) program. This collaborative project spanned between September 2020 and August 2023. The partnership, commonly referred to as the ›project‹, was led by the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Poland). It included the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece), Bar-Ilan University in Tel Aviv (Israel), the University of Edinburgh (United Kingdom), the University of Granada (Spain), Jagiellonian University in Kraków (Poland), the University of Konstanz (Germany), the University of Rijeka (Croatia) and the University for Foreigners of Siena (Italy). As specified in the project proposal, the primary objective of the TEAM initiative was to educate both in-service and pre-service teachers across various school subjects on the diverse dimensions of multilingualism. This was achieved through the development of a state-of-the-art open-access online course on multilingualism, designed for use in teacher training institutions and beyond.

The TEAM initiative emerged in response to the pressing need to equip teachers, teacher trainees and other education professionals with basic and up-to-date information about multilingualism in the context of education.

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1    TEAM project: *Teacher Education About Multilingualism* [project outline]. <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/de/projects/search/details/2020-1-PL01-KA203-082136> (access: 10.2.2024).

This information is often absent from teacher training curricula in higher education institutions across Europe, leaving educators inadequately prepared to teach in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms.[2] This deficiency in teacher preparation is especially problematic in contemporary Europe, where heightened migration and mobility have caused considerable demographic changes. Teachers across various disciplines, used to teaching in linguistically and culturally homogenous classrooms, now increasingly encounter students who do not speak the school language (well), speak another language (or other languages) at home, and come from cultural backgrounds distinct from the majority population. The TEAM initiative sought to address these issues by equipping teachers with the tools necessary to better meet the needs of these students, fostering inclusivity, and enhancing the social relevance of their teaching through its online course.

## 2. General properties of the TEAM course

The TEAM course[3] offers state-of-the-art, research-driven insights into multilingualism from a multidisciplinary perspective. This interdisciplinary course, in which the term ›multilingualism‹ is used to refer to both bilingualism and multilingualism, is freely accessible via a Moodle platform hosted by the Adam Mickiewicz University.[4] It features audio-visual materials available on the TEAM YouTube channel[5] (screencasts,[6] interviews with experts and testimonials from multilingual speakers), accompanied by explanations, quizzes, reading lists and other materials. The course is available in nine languages – Arabic, Croatian, English, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Polish and Spanish – reflecting the official languages of the (former) TEAM partnership, promoting linguistic inclusivity.

2    Michael Becker-Mrotzek, Britta Hentschel, Kathrin Hippmann, Markus Linnemann: *Sprachförderung in deutschen Schulen – die Sicht der Lehrerinnen und Lehrer. Ergebnisse einer Umfrage unter Lehrerinnen und Lehrern*, 2012. In: Mercator-Institut für Sprachförderung und Deutsch als Zweitsprache. <https://www.mercator-institut-sprachfoerderung.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Lehrerumfrage_Langfassung_final_30_05_03.pdf> (access: 10.2.2024).

3    TEAM project: *Teacher Education About Multilingualism* [online course]. <https://teamcourse.bilingualism-matters.org> (access: 10.2.2024).

4    The course can be accessed through the link provided in note 1. It is not necessary to register to use the course, but registration allows users to track their progress through the course.

5    TEAM project: *Teacher Education About Multilingualism* [YouTube channel]. <https://www.youtube.com/@TEAMMultilingual> (access: 10.2.2024).

6    These materials are accompanied by PowerPoint presentations.

Although the course was primarily developed for teachers, teacher trainees and other education professionals, it is equally valuable for a broader audience, such as higher education students from various disciplines, including linguistics, (modern) languages and literatures, speech and language therapy, education and psychology. Additionally, members of the general public, including parents of multilingual children, heritage speakers and second-language learners, may find specific parts of the course useful. The course's highly modular structure, organised into thematic units, allows different target users to tailor their engagement to their specific needs. Although parts of the course can be accessed in any order, new users may find it easier to navigate the course if they first study the content of the Introduction (see below). In formal education settings, the course can serve as a new curriculum component or be integrated into existing curricula. It lends itself to be used in a traditional classroom and in a blended/hybrid learning environment. The course is suitable for both guided as well as self-study. The following sections outline the structure and content of the course, with a particular focus on the contributions of the University of Rijeka project team to its development.

## 3. Structure and content of the TEAM course

The course consists of an Introduction and four modules, each focusing on a distinct aspect of multilingualism: linguistic, neurocognitive, social and cultural, and pedagogical. The **Introduction** includes a selection of materials from four modules (i.e. ten audio-visual resources) and an additional video resource underscoring the significance of multilingualism for teachers. The purpose of the Introduction is to define basic concepts in the field of multilingualism and to present some of the factors influencing multilingual development.

The module addressing the **linguistic aspects of multilingualism** is divided into three sections. Section 1 examines various forms of multilingual development and addresses the challenges associated with the concept of the native speaker. It defines key terms such as ›bilingualism‹ and ›multilingualism‹ and distinguishes between simultaneous and sequential bi-/multilingualism, individual and societal bi-/multilingualism, as well as majority and minority languages. The section also explains the concepts of ›heritage language‹ and ›heritage speaker‹, discussing some of the differences between heritage and non-heritage first language development, as well as the relationship between dialects and heritage languages. Additionally, it

addresses phenomena such as first language attrition, its impact on language teachers and language learners, as well as the role of language history in multilingual language development.

Section 2 delves into the development of linguistic subsystems (speech sounds, vocabulary and grammar) among different types of (typically developing) multilingual speakers, along with code-switching. In the context of describing vocabulary development, the focus is on the mental lexicon, cognates and false friends. In the context of grammatical development, the section examines articles, null and overt subject pronouns (presented in a screencast by Tihana Kraš, PhD, the leader of the University of Rijeka project team), tense and aspect, subject-verb agreement, gender assignment and agreement, and wh-questions. Another screencast by Tihana Kraš addresses the relationship between the two languages in a bilingual child, focusing on the issues of language separation and crosslinguistic influence. The materials devoted to code-switching present its definition, types and causes, along with the rules that govern it.

Section 3 explores the language development of multilingual children who exhibit atypical language development, in particular Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It contrasts the properties of language development in multilingual children with DLD and with ASD, highlighting the distinct effects of language exposure on these two developmental trajectories, also providing information about assessing multilingual children for language and learning disorders.

The module dedicated to the **neurocognitive aspects of multilingualism** offers insights into the neurocognitive processes relevant for teachers in a multilingual classroom, such as concentration, information processing, comprehension, retention, and acquisition of information. Section 1 examines neurocognitive aspects of bilingualism, and Section 2 neurocognitive aspects of language acquisition. More precisely, Section 1 describes the neuroanatomy of the bilingual brain and discusses the relationship between multilingualism and medical science and practice. It also explains how exposure to multiple languages impacts the way we use our native language and the way our mind and brain work. Additionally, it explores the interplay between language and thought, emphasizing linguistic categorisation and linguistic relativity. Finally, it tackles the perception of foreign-accented speech. Section 2 addresses memory systems relevant to second-language learning and the role of working memory in bilingualism. The section also discusses the contexts of second language acquisition, learning strategies used in this process and individual differences associated with it. Finally, it explores the relationship between learning context and cognition.

The module focusing on the **social and cultural dimensions of multilingualism** explores an array of issues associated with the presence of multilingualism in society across diverse cultural contexts. Section 1 examines issues concerning the identities of immigrants and new speakers, alongside with intercultural encounters. More specifically, it discusses the notions of interculturality, intercultural education and cultural mediation, explaining the roles of cultural mediators in educational contexts. Section 2 examines family language policy (FLP) from theoretical, empirical and practical perspectives. The theoretical aspects are presented in a screencast by Zvjezdana Vrzić, PhD, a member of the University of Rijeka project team. The screencast identifies the components of FLP and describes the types of outcomes of FLPs. Examples of the implementation of FLP in multilingual families are provided through six testimonials from parents raising their children multilingually. These testimonials are provided by Sandra Marman, Tihana Kraš and Zvjezdana Vrzić, all members of the University of Rijeka project team. In the testimonials, parents reflect on their experiences, the strategies they adopted and challenges they faced in the process of multilingual upbringing of their children. This section also addresses several issues related to minority and endangered languages, i.e. language shift, language maintenance and language revitalisation. In this context, social, communal and individual factors leading to language shift or supporting language maintenance are discussed in a screencast by Zvjezdana Vrzić. Finally, Section 3 explores various issues related to the integration of migrants and refugees. It outlines the profile of refugee populations in Greece and discusses both challenges and good practices in refugee education. Additionally, it addresses factors influencing the social integration of migrants and refugees, suggesting actions to facilitate their inclusion. Finally, it gives access to Migration in Action ›roadmaps‹, which offer insights into the psychological processes and factors to consider when working with a culturally and/or linguistically diverse children in the classroom.

The module addressing the **pedagogical aspects of multilingualism** provides an overview of key issues in multilingual education. Section 1 explores language-sensitive pedagogies in multilingual classrooms, focusing on the role of language in education and the specific features of academic language. Strategies to enhance the development of academic language in multilingual educational settings are also discussed. Section 2 examines teaching approaches tailored to various multilingual settings, more precisely to language instruction for migrants and refugees, with special attention to grammar and vocabulary. It offers an American perspective on teaching migrant learners in the classroom setting, along with the implementation

of learning strategies by multilingual learners and strategy-based instruction of these learners. Furthermore, it delves into pluralistic approaches to language education and their role in preserving linguistic and cultural diversity. Finally, it addresses pedagogical translanguaging, presenting both theoretical insights into this pedagogy and practical suggestions for its implementation in the classroom (from nursery to secondary school).

## 4. Promotion and use of the TEAM course in Croatia

To promote the TEAM course within the Croatian context, a conference titled *Multilingual students and their teachers: Presentation and application of the results of the TEAM project in the Republic of Croatia* was held at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka, on 29 August 2023. Organised by the members of the University of Rijeka project team, the conference was attended by primary school, secondary school and university teachers, teacher trainees, nursery nurses, school librarians, psychologists and speech and language therapists, school and faculty administrators, advisers from the Croatian Education and Teacher Training Agency and others. In addition to that, the conference featured a workshop titled *Challenges of teaching multilingual students*, which incorporated a screencast from the TEAM course on academic language in order to introduce the topic of teaching students with limited proficiency in the school language and facilitate a discussion about it. Feedback from attendees indicated that both the workshop and the conference as a whole were highly appreciated and well-received.

At the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka, parts of the TEAM course are actively integrated into several courses on language acquisition taught by Tihana Kraš within the teaching module of the MA program in English Language and Literature. Additionally, the authors of this paper are currently using the TEAM course audio-visual materials in an elective ›communis‹ course called *Višejezičnost* (Multilingualism), offered to all students at the University of Rijeka since the summer semester of the 2023–2024 academic year. In our experience, the TEAM course audio-visual materials have proven invaluable for introducing lesson topics, stimulating group and classroom discussions, assigning homework and other tasks, and providing them with guidance for further study. For instance, after viewing a screencast from the TEAM course's linguistic module on the difference between majority, minority language and heritage languages (and speakers), students might be tasked with briefly creating

profiles of real or invented heritage language speakers, and ask their fellow students to guess the expected level of heritage language proficiency of the described speaker. Additionally, students could be assigned to write an argumentative essay discussing whether the effects of first language attrition are permanent or reversible after engaging with the audio-visual materials and the recommended literature on this topic in the same module of the TEAM course. Furthermore, students could be asked to identify different components of FLP mentioned in a screencast about this phenomenon, using examples from (some of) the six testimonials of parents who raise their children multilingually in the TEAM course social and cultural module.

The flexible, modular and interactive design of the course makes it adaptable to a wide range of educational and other settings in a variety of ways, as demonstrated by the aforementioned examples. The selection, potential adaptation and use of the course content entirely depend on the interests and needs of potential users, making the course suitable for different (educational) purposes. We encourage potential users to explore the course and apply creativity and innovation in the way they use it to deepen their own and/or their students' understanding of multilingualism.